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State Shows Modest Dip in November Unemployment

OLYMPIA – Washington's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate fell one-tenth of a percentage point to 6.6 percent in November, Employment Security Commissioner Sylvia P. Mundy announced today. The nation's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate increased by three-tenths of a percentage point to 6.0 percent. Washington's non-adjusted unemployment rate rose three-tenths of a percentage point to 6.7 percent.

"The November numbers hint at very modest improvement in the Washington labor market in the last quarter of 2002," said Mundy. "Washington's jobless rate remains significantly above the national rate, however, and key sectors have not recovered."

Washington's nonagricultural wage and salary employment increased by 2,900 over the month, a non-adjusted increase of 0.1 percent following gains in employment in both September and October. Seasonally adjusted employment estimates prepared in collaboration with the Office of the Forecast Council, however, show a decline of 2,100 during November. This seasonally adjusted decline indicates that Washington's employment increased less than normal.

Non-adjusted numbers show a job decline in manufacturing of 5,000, of which half was due to seasonal layoffs in the food sector. Construction declined by 5,300 jobs as the rainy season began. Retail sales employment climbed by 6,200 jobs, which is not quite as high as is normal for the start of the Christmas shopping season. The unusually late date for the Thanksgiving Holiday may, in part, explain the low numbers. Services were down 2,100, with less than normal declines in hotels and recreational. The government sector is up less than normal, with unusually small gains in some areas of local government.

Nonagricultural employment in Washington is significantly lower than last year, with a non-adjusted decline of 33,200. The over-the-year losses have narrowed steadily since August, and this is the smallest year-over-year decrease so far in 2002. More than 80 percent of that decline has been in the manufacturing sector, with two-fifths of the state's job losses in aircraft and parts. There were also large drops in construction, transportation, communications, and utilities, and wholesale and retail trade. Employment rose in finance, insurance, and real estate, services, and government. The gains in local education and federal government outweighed declines in state government. The year-over-year change in service sector jobs has been steadily improving. By September 2002, employment was almost equal to a year before, and service employment showed year-to-year increases in both October and November.